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Commission on the Status of Women
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Item 3 (c) (ii) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: women's human rights and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls as defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly

Statement submitted by the European Women's Lobby, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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The European Women's Lobby welcomes the fact that the Commission on the Status of Women will review the implementation of policies and actions taken to address violence against women over the past decade and states the following:

The European Women's Lobby recalls that the Beijing Platform for Action clearly states that violence against women is the result of the historically unequal power relations between women and men, and notes that over the past decade the gender dimension of violence against women is being eroded and replaced by neutral concepts that describe the issue in terms of family dynamics (domestic violence) and/or market policies (prostitution and other forms of sexual exploitation). The European Women's Lobby calls on the European Union and the United Nations to explicitly recognize that violence against women is the direct result of unequal power relations between women and men in all public statements, policies and programmes.

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The European Women's Lobby notes that while many commitments to address violence against women have been made both at the regional (European Union) and international (United Nations) level over the past decade, the issue of follow-up and monitoring has been seriously neglected as systematic data and statistics on all forms of violence against women are still lacking. Systematic analysis of the impact of male violence on women experiencing multiple discrimination as a result of the intersection of gender, ethnic origins, sexual orientation, colour, disability and/or religion is also lacking. The European Women's Lobby calls for greater use of existing mechanisms such as national reports on the implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and calls for guidelines to facilitate data on violence against women for those sections of the report that are relevant. The European Women's Lobby invites both the European Union and the United Nations to consider the work already done in this area and especially its proposal on indicators to measure progress, to determine gaps and to identify and address emerging issues in combating violence against women.[1]

The European Women's Lobby considers trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation as one of the most pressing issues to emerge on an international basis over the past decade and insists that prostitution and trafficking are directly linked to the lack of economic independence of women and the structural power relationships between women and men. Measures fighting poverty and contributing to women's empowerment will have a decisive impact in combating trafficking and all forms of exploitation of women. The European Women's Lobby strongly opposes any measure that aims to legalize prostitution as a form of work on the pretext that this will guarantee better social and economic conditions for women in prostitution. Moreover, such an approach undermines the progress achieved in some areas of equality for women over the past 50 years. Therefore, efforts to combat trafficking in women for the purpose of sexual exploitation should be multi-dimensional and include addressing the demand side, i.e., the buyers/clients of the sexual market.

The European Women's Lobby also calls on the Governments of the members of the European Union and the United Nations to be vigilant of emerging forms of violence against women, these include: the use of new technologies as a means of exacerbating violence against women and the rise of cultural and religious fundamentalism, which undermine women's human rights, their dignity and equality.

[1] European Women's Lobby, "Towards a common European framework to monitor progress in combating violence against women", second edition 2002, developed with the input of the experts of the EWL Observatory on violence against women.